ISSN 0712-7774

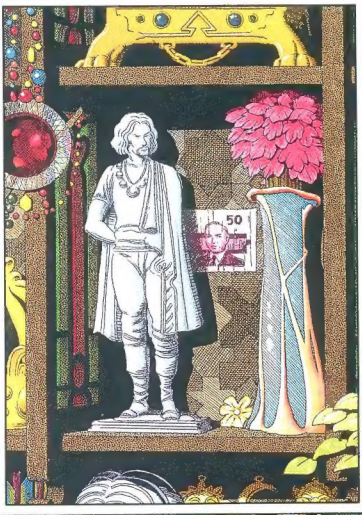
$2.25 CAN $2.00 UK £1.25

CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

(28)

CHANGES



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JAN

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

While this will have *some* application to self-publishing, I'm going to try to write an overview of the single largest creator dilemma in the direct market.

Put as simply as possible, a successful comic book is composed of three elements: creator, creation and a reliable schedule. If you review the histories of those books that have had the greatest success in the direct market since its advent, this becomes indisputable. Moore, Bissette and Totleben on *Swamp Thing*, Jeff Smith and *Bone*, Neil Gaiman and *Sandman*, Peter Bagge and *Hate*, Frank Miller and Klaus Janson on *Daredevil*, Chris Claremont on the *X-Men*, etc. And yet most energy in the direct market is expended in an attempt to disprove this. Creators are separated from their creations (while Alan didn't create *Swamp Thing*, nor Claremont the *X-Men*, what they made those characters into became separate from their original creation). Todd McFarlane (among others) is facing the crossroads of success in the direct market; down one road beckons Hollywood, 'real' world merchandising and a life as CEO of *Spawn*, down another road, continuing as the writer and artist of *Spawn*. Again, if you examine the history of the direct market, others have confronted the same dilemma. Kevin Eastman and Pete Laird picked Hollywood/ merchandising over reinforcing their substantial and lucrative presence in the direct market. Once you choose Hollywood/merchandising over the direct market, the former will flourish at the expense of the latter (assuming you become a 'real' world success). Where the *Turtles* were once a force to be reckoned with in comic book stores (the single greatest and most visible success story originating in the direct market), their 'real' world success has reduced them to a marginal, virtually inconsequential presence. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with this. Creative freedom has to include the freedom to choose the real world over the direct market. A great deal of the problem with Image stems from the inability of its members to choose one over the other; or, even more dangerously, to recognize that it is a choice; you can't have both. Much of their lateness can be attributed to pursuing the Hollywood brass ring, the *Turtles*-style success. I'm sure they have the best of intentions of staying on schedule, but negotiating any kind of high-level contract consumes a great deal of attention. If you sign for a movie deal and manage to get a clause in there giving you creative control, the sheer nature of business will dictate that you have to spend most of your time being a businessman. Creative control means that you control other people's creative efforts (In the context of Hollywood), it doesn't mean you spend your time creating. To arrive at a contract you find acceptable requires countless hours of meetings between yourself and your lawyer; yourself, your lawyer and the studio's lawyer; yourself, your lawyer, the studio's lawyer, low level bureaucrats, then higher level bureaucrats and ultimately (maybe) someone who can actually make a decision and who will undo everything you have put together to that point. All the while that you are negotiating, you are not writing and drawing (although I will give Todd points for insisting that the Hollywood types come and visit him at the house and that he works on *Spawn* pages while he hacks his way through the bureaucratic obfuscation). Fans are returning to the *X-men* in record numbers, drawn back to the 'hot' characters that Jim Lee and Rob Liefield created under the terms of work-made-for-hire. Why? Because those characters continue to come out on a regular schedule: certainly a schedule a good deal more regular than W.I.L.D.CATS or YOUNGBLOOD. There is a clear message in this. Fans prefer that a creator stay with his creation and bring it out on a regular basis, above anything else. But faced with a choice between creator ownership and control of a character (two elements of the troika) and a character not being done by the creator that comes out on a regular basis (the other two elements of the troika), the creator will come out on the losing end every time. I'm not saying this is right or wrong, I'm just stating a basic fact of the direct market.

Hollywood/merchandising deals are the serpent in the garden, the major stumbling block, the easiest way to distract the average comic book creator from turning a small direct market success into a large and firmly entrenched direct market success. Gerhard and I can own and control *Cerebus* and, by choice, keep the amount of time we spend on the business side to a bare minimum. Once you move into the outside world, the amount of time you spend on the business side is out of your control. A good friend of mine spent a lot of time and ten thousand dollars trying to come up with an equitable wide-ranging contract governing merchandising of his characters. No matter what he did, no matter that there was a clear understanding at the outset that the contract was ONLY for merchandising, that the contract was for a finite period and that film and TV rights were not included, the revised contract always specified the surrendering of rights. He walked away ten thousand dollars poorer, behind schedule and I think (I hope) a little wiser.

Corporations, however big or small, will use up your time and your money, gradually wearing you down until you have to give in or walk away. Since they don't *produce* anything, they merely *own* things, this is all they have to do all day. Two meetings or fifty meetings; it makes no difference to them as long as they get their way in the end.

You have a grace period in the direct market where your fans and the retailers will tolerate infrequent publication. Once you have exceeded that grace period (as Image has, in spades), your customer base erodes rapidly and you have to start over again from square one; or you have to start making concessions to the corporations you're negotiating with and just hope that you have that one-in-a-million *Turtles*-style hit; and not just another movie dud like *Rocketeer* or *Howard the Duck*.

Just a word to the wise.

CEREBUS

NO. 178 JANUARY 1994

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

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BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

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BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

CEREBUS IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC. P.O. BOX 1674 STN. C. KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA N2G 4R2

ALL CONTENTS © 1994 DAVE SIM.

PRINTED IN CANADA BY **PRENEY PRINT & LITHO INC.**, WINDSOR, ONTARIO.

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Gingerly, upon his lap, Victor Reid held the fragile cut-and-pasted first instalment of Ascension. *The previous night he had decided that he simply couldn't face his meeting with Karen Potts (assuming she would even grant him an audience today) unarmed. He had hastily assembled the first chapter, cobbling together fragments from an unpublished short story, paragraphs he* had intended for a much later appearance in the series as well as disconnected bits of Milieu's research, fleshing out the resultant patchwork quilt with bridging and connecting passages that were (at best) awkward and (at worst) completely irrelevant to his story. He was doubtful that he could, when the time came, make sense of the dissonant new elements, but, thought Victor, ruefully, he would just have to jump off that bridge when he came to it.

He found a certain poetic resonance in the fact that the fractured, hodgepodge instalment and his life mirrored one another. He was a wealthy man, contemplating imminent — virtually inevitable — poverty (five hundred and fifty-six crowns represented the residuary lifeblood in his hemorrhaging bank account); he was popular, well loved and yet completely alone; he was too affluent to enjoy the company of the working classes and too working-class for the sensibilities of the wealthy; he was His Own Boss ('the pilot of his destiny and the captain of his soul', as the saying went) whose extremities froze and whose heart palpitated at the prospect of confronting an unsalaried receptionist.

Even as the taxi lurched and bounced across the Rivershire Bridge into the Lower City, even as he gently braced the newly reassembled *Ascension* (the completed chapter as well as the — he fervently hoped — intriguing ten-part outline), the newly reassembled Victor was rehearsing a variety of unsuitable overtures.

Mrs. Potts wants to see this right away.

Too impertinent. Had Mrs. Potts not already indicated that she felt no great urgency to see Victor himself? Was it not altogether likely that her anticipation of his scrap-heap composition's arrival might, most charitably, be described as less-than-breathless in its nature?

This is the first instalment of my read. I wonder if you would mind taking it in to Mrs. Potts?

Too obsequious. What if she said, 'Why, yes — I mind very much', and then mentioned his effrontery to Mrs. Potts herself? What if she said 'Oh, *Ascension*. You must be Victor Reid. Mrs. Potts asked me to get a bank draught for two thousand crowns from you'?

I'm afraid this instalment is very late. You'd better take it in to Mrs. Potts right away.

Too confessional *and* too impertinent. What if the receptionist were under strict instructions to summon a constable and to have recalcitrant authors charged, on the spot, with fraud or embezzlement? What if there were a Deadline Policeman equipped with a studded truncheon on the very premises?

Victor's heart was pounding and his throat dry as he stepped into the receptionist's lair, swiftly placing the manuscript and outline on his adversary's desk.

'Excuse me this is the first instalment and outline for *Ascension* which is the read I wrote and I'm afraid I'm delivering it late but Mrs. Potts will want to see it right away because as I said it's very late before I go in to meet with her if she has the time later on right away if you wouldn't mind.'

Victor bit his bottom lip and braced himself for a stinging rebuke. A glimmer of hope flared in his breast as the receptionist simply stared at the disjointed pile of papers before her. Indisputably, he had gained the high ground. The hairpin turns from aggression to confession to impertinence shored up with parenthetical bracings of deferential obsequiousness had her flummoxed. What could the poor girl say? Double usage of the word 'late', underscored by Victor's quietly panic-stricken demeanour, had struck a deep and resonant chord. The mere act of placing the manuscript on her desk had threatened to make the receptionist a *de facto* co-conspirator in Victor's procrastination. She raised her head slowly and favoured him with a smile which caused the room temperature to drop, abruptly, by several degrees.

'If you'll have a seat . . .?'

The ellipsis was pregnant with unspoken, yet dire, consequence. If you'll have a seat it will give me time to determine the best way to rid myself of you and your petty problem. If you'll have a seat I will set to work immediately planning the most excruciatingly painful demise for you.

Victor edged backward and lowered himself slowly onto his familiar chair. Instead of looking at the landscape, he focussed his

attentions on the receptionist, who had resumed her writing. She attempted to meet his gaze with intimidating disinterest. It was, however, too late. The curtains had parted once more, but now *she* was the player upon the stage and *Victor* was *her* audience, regarding her with indifferent curiosity.

After a few moments, in her best thespian manner, she replaced her pen in her ornate desk set. Heaving a sigh of theatrical proportions (appropriate to the room's acoustics), she rose, assembling a small pile of memos, letters and packages. She then turned upon her heel and opened the frosted door and was about to step through to the inner sanctum of Vertigo Horse. Here she halted (a gesture broad enough to play effectively to the upper reaches of the second balcony; a gesture which plainly stated, 'Oh, I almost forgot.'). Turning back to her desk, she scooped up the *Ascension* chapter and outline in a single smooth and efficient movement and then she was gone, shutting the door a little more firmly (Victor suspected) than she had intended.

Victor smiled and eased himself back into his chair, joining his hands behind his head and jauntily crossing his legs. His left foot danced merrily on air. He softly hummed to himself.

Two hours later, Victor was sitting as agreeably upright in the chair as he could manage; his hands were folded as inoffensively as possible in his lap. Staring at the landscape (he had decided, about forty minutes before) bespoke a kind of willful arrogance, an unbecoming pride; instead he examined, thoughtfully, his inoffensively folded hands, wondering why it was that they seemed so far away from him.

Ah, thought Victor.

The last time he had found himself sitting just this way, there had been a small rectangular desktop level with his chest as he served the only detention he had been assessed during his years of public school.

Twice he had hazarded a glance in the direction of the receptionist out of the corner of his eye. On both occasions, she had been staring directly at him, smiling serenely.

'Victor Reid?'

'Yes?' he answered, far too quickly and far too loudly, leaping to his feet. Rescuer or tormentor, executioner or saviour: anything was preferable to another moment in this room, the weight of the receptionist's gaze like a millstone around his neck, a vise crushing his heart.

'I'm Carl Berger, Mrs. Potts' assistant.'

They shook hands, then, beaming at one another. Some moments later, Victor felt Berger's hand tug slightly, which Victor took as a signal to disengage. Victor did so somewhat reluctantly, fearful that the man might depart, leaving Victor trapped once more in reception purgatory.

'I'm a big admirer of your work,' Berger said after several moments of silent beaming (leaning back a bit as a silent, beaming Victor stepped closer to him).

'Ah,' Victor had said. There was no suitable rejoinder or response to such an observation (as any author could tell you), but the palpable gratitude welling up within Victor demanded release of some kind.

'Well, I'm very pleased to meet here.'

He had *intended* to say, 'I'm very pleased to meet you' or 'I'm very pleased to be here.' If Berger had noticed the hybrid *non sequitur*, he gave no sign.

'Well, let's go back to my office, shall we?'

Manfully, Victor resisted the urge to stick his tongue out at the receptionist as he passed her desk.

'There are some very good things in here,' said Carl Berger, tapping the pile of papers in front of him (a thin strip of words came loose, adhering to his index finger; he flicked at it lightly with his thumb until it detached itself and rejoined its fellows).

'There's a lot of . . .'

His brow furrowed and he seemed to drift away, flipping through some manner of mental thesaurus for an appropriate noun.

'. . . research,' he said at last (in a toneless voice as furrowed as his brow) and then looked perplexed: as if his sentence had ended itself in a manner at considerable variance to his original intention for it. He looked up at Victor, his eyebrows arched in genuine surprise, as if to say, 'You noticed it too, didn't you?'

'You've gone to a lot of trouble here, Victor,' he said, regarding the small stack of pages as he would a singularly endearing beggar or orphan. He then looked up at Victor with an identical expression, effectively uniting the author and his work in a common state of abject misery, 'Which makes what I have to tell you all the more . . . difficult.'

Victor felt sudden and simultaneous urges to defecate, vomit and cry. The floor fell away beneath him and he could feel the beige walls edging closer to each other and to him, as if, as members in good standing in the vast Vertigo Horse empire, they were as entitled as Carl Berger to share in this carrion feast.

'Karen — Mrs. Potts,' he continued (establishing their respective proximities relative to the editor *in absentia:* Berger steadfastly by her side, trusted aide, confidant and ally, and Victor, somewhere beneath the sole of her shoe, slowly being ground into a less troublesome configuration of flesh and blood), 'feels that you could've saved yourself a lot of wasted time and effort if only we could've . . . gotten together on this some weeks ago.'

The plurality of the nominative pronoun beckoned to Victor like a life preserver on the waves of disaster washing over and around him. He hurled himself at it, clutching it to him, wedding it to his heart and soul.

'Well — uh — what can *we* do?' he stammered, hoarsely.

Carl Berger leaned back in his oversized chair, considering their mutual problem, pressing his lips against his clasped hands. Victor, unconsciously, did the same. There they sat, as Berger considered their mutual options, carefully, and Victor awaited their mutual conclusion — whatever Berger decided it would be — anxiously. The very thought that their mutual conclusion might be a parting of the ways filled Victor with a nameless dread, for he knew exactly what that would entail: Victor trading his townhouse, his furniture, his expensive clothes and the remnants of his bank account for a small pile of pasted-together bits of paper.

'I'm not sure there's *anything . . . we . . . can* . . . do,' said Berger, sliding forward, as if signalling by ellipsis and emphasis that he had switched to a foreign language or a Vertigo Horse dialect with which Victor was wholly unfamiliar, but which he would have to translate for himself (although he got the impression that Berger was doing his best to assist Victor in this regard).

Anything. We. Can.

Victor picked and prodded at the three words, turning them over in his mind in an attempt to extract their hidden significance. Though no mention had been made of any temporal constraint, Victor was certain he had only a limited amount of time in which to solve the puzzle.

'The printing deadline is five days from now,' said Berger, as if speaking, helpfully, to a more than usually dim-witted child. It must be another clue, thought Victor. Berger turned his left palm upward, holding the hand open, as if it contained some manifestation of his just-completed assertion.

'The manuscript isn't what we're looking for,' his right palm now mirrored his left. The palms, the sentences, were two halves of a mathematical problem. Victor? Two . . . plus . . . two . . . equals?

'Maybe,' Victor offered, warily, 'Maybe if I knew what you *were* looking for.' (He was *thinking*, you want me to say 'four', I'll say 'four' — you want me to say 'seven', I'll say 'seven' — only please don't take my townhouse.)

Berger smiled beneficently. Victor, inwardly, heaved a sigh of relief. It was going to be all right. He had given the right answer.

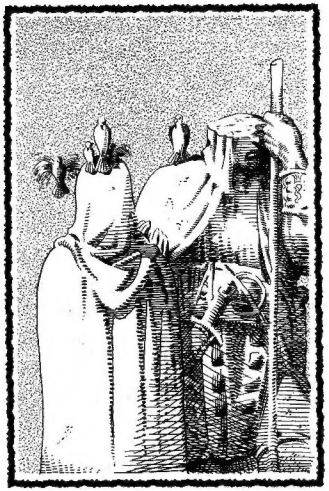
'For three months now,' Carl Berger said, with newfound enthusiasm, 'Deedee and Em have been rating your three Palnu reads at or near the top of their Top One Hundred list.'

Victor wondered why the opinions of two women regarding his Palnu reads would have any significance for Carl Berger or Vertigo Horse. Berger had removed a booklet from the top drawer of his desk and was holding it up for Victor to see. On the cover were two stylized, inter-locking 'D's and an over-sized 'M'. D.D.M. Davis, Diamond and Madison. It was, evidently, a publication of theirs entitled 'Internal Dialogue'.

Berger paused, mistaking the confusion on Victor's face for bruised artistic sensibilities.

'Please don't get me wrong,' he admonished. 'I told you that I'm a big admirer of your work and I am. That's why Karen — Mrs. Potts — asked me to speak with you. I've been following you for — Tarim, how long has it been, now? Ten years? Since I entered university. I must have scoured every reads store between here and Upper Felda looking for the reads that I missed. The minute one of your new works comes in, I have to sit down and finish it before I do anything else. It's about the only thing that I go into a reads store to look for. I mean, all of the things coming out now are such a pile of . . .'

He paused, then, as if remembering who and where he was, and scanned the immediate vicinity as if checking for any late-arriving body parts of the auditory persuasion, fearful that some part of the beige wall behind him had already detached itself and might, even



now, be gliding stealthily towards him. He leaned forward, conspiratorially, and gestured for Victor to follow suit.

'What Mr. Prosserman wants,' Victor noted the singularity of the name and took the conspicuous absence of 'Mike' as an indication that he and Berger were on an equal footing — or sharing the same leaky rowboat — relative to Vertigo Horse's owner-publisher. 'What Mr. Prosserman wants is something along the lines of your Palnu series. You've been in this business a lot longer than I have, Victor. I don't need to tell *you* what a phenomenon you've created. I understand that Shadow Press has had to buy its own printing plant and they *still* can't keep up with the demand.' He grinned broadly. 'I can't even imagine what your royalty cheques must look like. All those zeroes.'

Carl Berger was a person of, to understate the case dramatically, severely limited imagination. But zeroes, many zeroes, zeroes inscribed upon a cashier's cheque stretching away from him, vanishing over some distant horizon . . . that many zeroes were the stuff of which Carl Berger dreams were constituted. His eyes half-lidded, he leaned back in his chair, savouring the image, vicariously, on Victor's behalf. As a result, it escaped his notice that Victor was frozen in his present posture, statue-like (though his eyes had widened dramatically and his face had drained of the little colour it possessed), his gaze still fixed on the space recently vacated by Carl Berger's head.

Alas, even so simple and redundant an image can only occupy the limited attention spans of the Carl Bergers of the world for so many moments before they are supplanted by the here and now. Seeing that Victor was still hunched forward in an attitude of rapt (albeit somewhat glassy-eyed) interest, Carl Berger's head reoccupied the space in question and resumed its exposition.

'We had advance orders for eighty thousand copies of the first instalment of *Ascension*. That doesn't even include the advance re-orders. When you missed your deadline, we cancelled the original solicitation and had Deedee and Em resolicit. We got orders for one hundred and TWENTY thousand. A fifty per cent increase on a resolicitation. If it wasn't for the fact that we need the money because nothing else around here sells worth . . .'

Again, Berger stopped in mid-sentence to regard his environs, warily. A singularly large fern (in the corner, by the window) seemed to arouse his suspicions, but as it contented itself with merely sitting there, contrasting nicely with the beige of the walls, he turned back to Victor and continued (though he did lower his voice a notch or two).

'. . . I think we'd just go on cancelling and resoliciting and cancelling and resoliciting until we hit a *million!*'

Carl Berger burst forth in a fit of maniacal giggling that would not have been out of place in an institution dedicated to the care and handling of those members of society which the Kevillists diplomatically referred to as the 'mentally challenged'. As Victor, for whatever reason (a disinterest in business concerns? sensitivity of the artistic sort?) did not see fit to join Berger in this jocular release, the assistant editor contained himself quickly, clearing his throat as if his outburst could (and should) be attributed to some rare and exotic form of whooping cough.

He frowned for what he hoped was a length of time sufficient to reassure his favourite author that he was a Serious Young Man, before permitting himself a smile.

'We're very excited,' he said. A vision of Denis Eastman joined the variety of disheartening images whirling through Victor's mind. 'I realize that five days is not a lot of time, but we have a lot of confidence in you.' Either Victor had missed something and Carl Berger had ascended to some throne or other during the author's momentary catatonia, or Mr. and Mrs. Potts-Prosserman had just joined them in spirit. He could almost picture them (though Mrs. Potts was less pictorially vivid, owing to Victor's never having met her), their heads bobbing in unison with Carl Berger's, smiling blissfully. His own head, by a kind of telepathic reflex, joined in.

'I'll do what I can,' said Victor.

'Wonderful. Excellent,' Carl Berger said, conveying the impression that consecutive superlatives were not an everyday occurrence within these beige walls.

Victor rose from his chair, small bones in his knees popping quietly in protest.

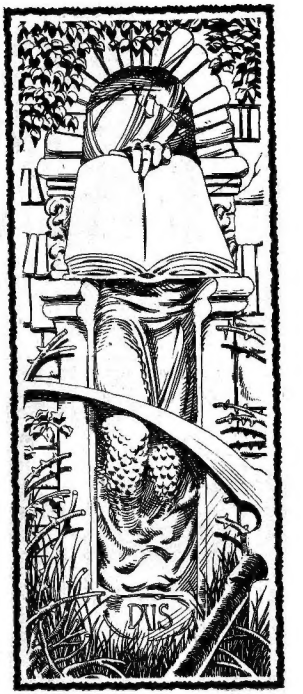
'Oh, I almost forgot,' Berger said, so convincingly that Victor believed his recollection was not theatrical in its nature. 'I have something to show you.' He bustled off behind Victor, who stood regarding the fern, expecting that, at any moment, it too would begin to nod and smile fatuously. 'We looked and looked for him, but he'd left. Extended vacation in the south. Rumours that he was going to buy Mehani- — the whole island. James McNeil, the one who imitates his style so well, agreed to do the interiors, but Karen

— Mrs. Potts — when she gets a bee in her bonnet about something . . . I thought I'd go mad. I tracked him down and he didn't want to do it, but I just kept offering him more and more money. I think he finally agreed just to get rid of me. Voilà!'

Berger held a piece of artboard in front of Victor. It was an M. Zulli piece: a picture of Beth (or her identical twin). Her head was thrown back, her mouth stretched open in full cry (of anger? pain? rage?). Her hands, delicate and cream-coloured, were like claws, pulling her robe open. Almost the entirety of her upper body was exposed; four parallel lines, crimson welts, followed the curve of each breast, connecting to the respective fingernails.

In the title-box above, in block serif letters it read:

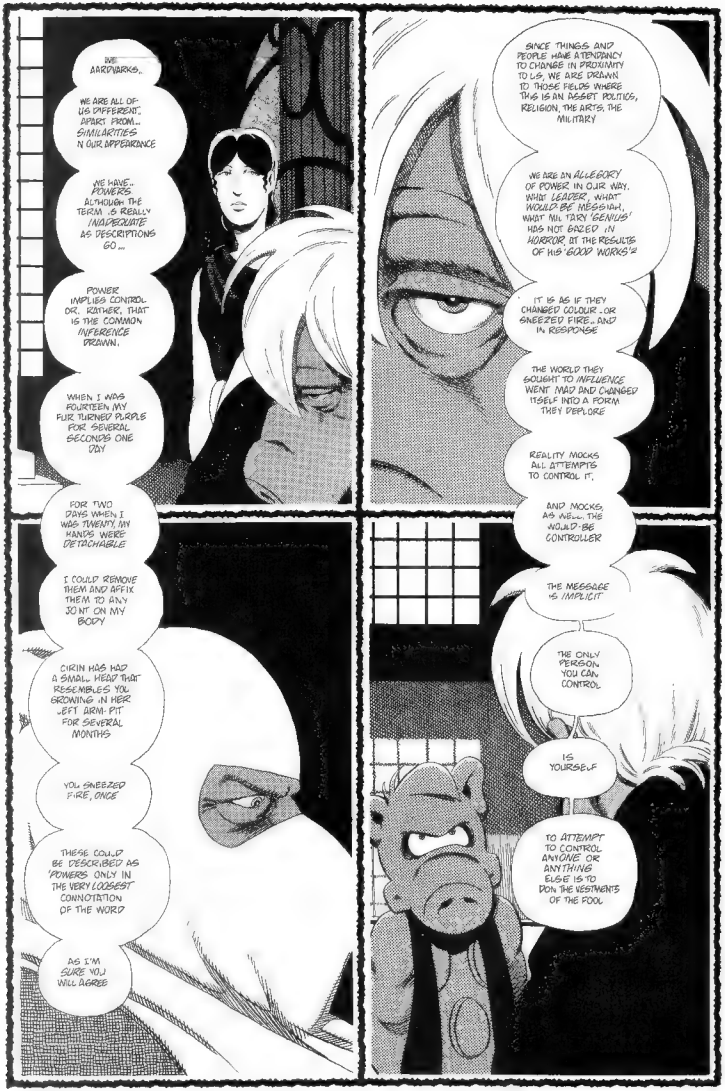
Ascension
by
Victor Reid

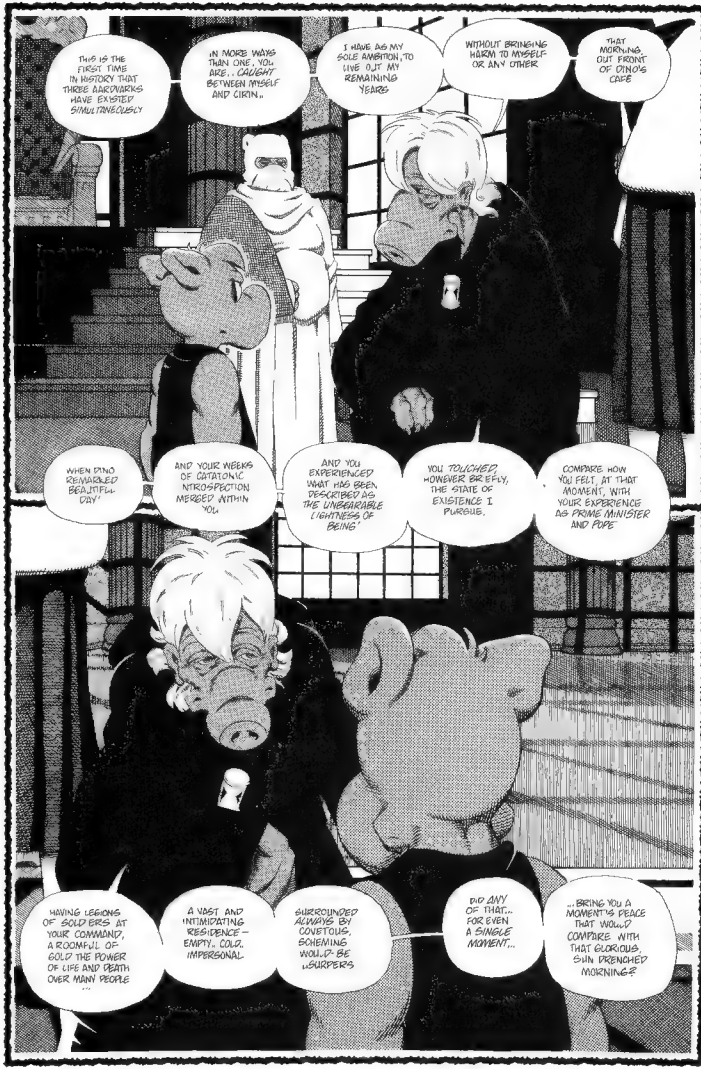


CIRIN.
ASHOKA HAD A MISCARRIAGE ... IT WAS NOT PHARMACEUTICALLY ASSISTED...
THERE IS NO CHILD.. AND THERE WAS NO ABORTION.
YOU'VE KNOWN THE FACTS OF THE CASE FOR YEARS ...
PRACTICALLY FROM THE MOMENT IT TOOK PLACE.
AND STILL ...
STILL YOU KEEP YOUR VENDETTA ALIVE-- ANOTHER PAPER TIGER.
ANOTHER ILLUSION OF YOUR OWN CREATION - WHICH YOU CLING TO...
JUST ONE AMONG THE MANY.
IT WAS THE PRINCIPLE -- SOMETHING I WOULD HARDLY EXPECT YOU TO UNDERSTAND, PD.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO THE HONOURS?
PLEASE
"WE BELIEVE, WITHOUT EQUIVOCATION, IN THE ABSOLUTE RIGHT OF FREE SPEECH. ADVOCACY OF ANY VIEWPOINT, HOWEVER DEPLORABLE, CANNOT IN ANY WAY BE ABRIDGED, BANNED OR SUPPRESSED. IT IS ONLY WHEN SOMEONE CONTRAVENES OUR LAWS BY COMMITTING AN ACT OF CONTRAVENTION THAT WE, AS A SOCIETY ARE JUSTIFIED IN THE PROSECUTION OF THAT PERSON TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW.
"WORDS ARE NOT DEEDS, AND SO, FALL OUTSIDE OF OUR JURISDICTION."
THE NEW MATRIARCHY-- PAGE ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-EIGHT
YOU PROSECUTED -- AND PERSECUTED ASTORIA FOR A CRIME YOU KNEW SHE DID NOT COMMIT
THE ONLY 'PRINCIPLE' SHE VIOLATED WAS AN UNSPOKEN ONE -- ABSOLUTE FEALTY AND DEFERENCE TO 'GREAT CIRIN'
SKRCH SKTCH
YOUR ONLY ENEMY IS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN YOURSELF
HOW MUCH BLOOD HAS BEEN SHED? HOW MANY LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST IN KEEPING THAT SIMPLE TRUTH FROM YOURSELF?
SNIFF
SNIFF SNIFF
WALK AWAY FROM HERE CIRIN. ASK FORGIVENESS OF THE GODDESS FOR YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS. SPEND THE REST OF YOUR DAYS CARING FOR THE CHILDREN - YOUR FIRST AND GREATEST LOVE.
ACCEPT WHAT SUFFERING COMES TO YOU - IN ACCEPTING IT, YOU WILL FIND TRUE REDEMPTION

CERBERUS?
WHAT
YOU?
YOU, I'VE NEVER KNOWN
I'VE WATCHED YOUR EVERY MOVE. LISTENED TO YOUR EVERY WORD
I'VE SHARED YOUR EVERY WAKING THOUGHT
THERE HASN'T BEEN A DAY GO BY THAT YOU HAVEN'T SURPRISED ME

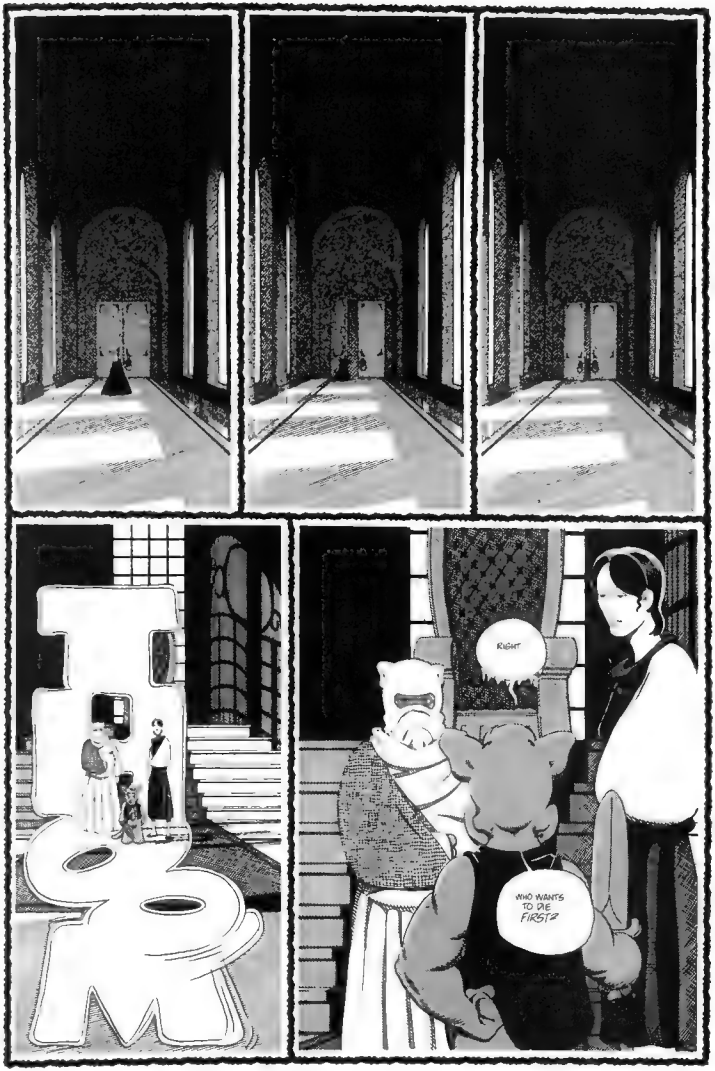

WE AARDVARKS..
WE ARE ALL OF US DIFFERENT, APART FROM... SIMILARITIES IN OUR APPEARANCE
WE HAVE... POWERS ALTHOUGH THE TERM IS REALLY INADEQUATE AS DESCRIPTIONS GO...
POWER IMPLIES CONTROL OR, HOWEVER, THAT IS THE COMMON INFERENCE DRAWN.
WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN, MY FUR TURNED PURPLE FOR SEVERAL SECONDS ONE DAY
FOR TWO DAYS WHEN I WAS TWENTY, MY HANDS WERE DETACHABLE
I COULD REMOVE THEM AND AFFIX THEM TO ANY JOINT ON MY BODY
CIRIN HAS HAD A SMALL HEAD THAT RESEMBLES YOU GROWING IN HER LEFT ARM-PIT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS
YOU SNEEZED FIRE, ONCE
THESE COULD BE DESCRIBED AS 'POWERS' ONLY IN THE VERY LOOSEST CONNOTATION OF THE WORD
AS I'M SURE YOU WILL AGREE
SINCE THINGS AND PEOPLE HAVE A TENDANCY TO CHANGE IN PROXIMITY TO US, WE ARE DRAWN TO THOSE FIELDS WHERE THIS IS AN ASSET: POLITICS, RELIGION, THE ARTS, THE MILITARY
WE ARE AN ALLEGORY OF POWER IN OUR WAY. WOW! LEADER, WHAT WOULD BE MESSIAH, WHAT MILITARY 'GENIUS' HAS NOT GAZED IN HORROR AT THE RESULTS OF HIS 'GOOD' WORKS?
IT IS AS IF THEY CHANGED COLOUR...OR SNEEZED FIRE... AND IN RESPONSE
THE WORLD THEY SOUGHT TO INFLUENCE WENT MAD AND CHANGED ITSELF INTO A FORM THEY DEPLORE
REALITY MOCKS ALL ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL IT.
AND MOCKS, AS WELL, THE WOULD-BE CONTROLLER
THE MESSAGE IS IMPLICIT
THE ONLY PERSON YOU CAN CONTROL
IS YOURSELF
TO ATTEMPT TO CONTROL ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE IS TO DON THE VESTMENTS OF THE FOOL


THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY THAT THREE ANOMARKS HAVE EXISTED SIMULTANEOUSLY
IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE, YOU ARE: CAUGHT BETWEEN MYSELF AND CIRIN.
I HAVE AS MY SOLE AMBITION, TO LIVE OUT MY REMAINING YEARS
WITHOUT BRINGING HARM TO MYSELF OR ANY OTHER
THAT MORNING OUT FRONT OF DINO'S CAFE
WHEN DINO REVEALED BEAUTIFUL DAY'
AND YOUR WEEKS OF CATATONIC NITROSPECTION MERGED WITHIN YOU.
AND YOU EXPERIENCED WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING'
YOU TOUCHED, HOWEVER BRIEFLY, THE STATE OF EXISTENCE I PURSUE.
COMPARE HOW YOU FELT, AT THAT MOMENT, WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE AS PRIME MINISTER AND POPE
HAVING LEGIONS OF SOLDIERS AT YOUR COMMAND, A ROOMFUL OF GOLD THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH OVER MANY PEOPLE ...
A VAST AND INTIMIDATING RESIDENCE — EMPTY, COLD, IMPERSONAL.
SURROUNDED ALWAYS BY COVETOUS, SCHEMING WOULD-BE USURPERS
DID ANY OF THAT... FOR EVEN A SINGLE MOMENT...
... BRING YOU A MOMENT'S PEACE THAT WOULD COMPARE WITH THAT GLORIOUS SUN DRENCHED MORNING?

IF YOU CAN'T SEE THE FOLLY IN YOUR OWN LIFE, THEN CONSIDER CLAIN
SHE BELIEVES THAT HER ONLY CHANCE FOR HAPPINESS IS TO REMAKE ESSARGION AND ITS PEOPLE IN HER OWN IMAGE
THE CLOSER SHE GETS TO HER OBJECTIVE, THE MORE IT RETREATS FROM HER
SHE IS MORE MISERABLE NOW THAN EVER BEFORE, EVEN AS THE PRIZE IS WITHIN HER GRASP
YOU AND SHE SHARE THE ILLUSION THAT ABSOLUTE CONTROL CAN BE EQUATED WITH ABSOLUTE HAPPINESS
IF YOU DO ASCEND AND IN SO DOING UNITE THE EASTERN AND WESTERN CHURCHES UNDER YOU
CAN YOU NOT SEE THAT THE PURSUING OF YOUR PREVIOUS WEALTH AND POWER
CAN ONLY BRING YOU!
DOUBLE THE MISERY!
WELL
I'VE LINGERED HERE TOO LONG ALREADY.

I HAVE SUCCUMBED TO MANY TEMPTATIONS
DEPLORING WOULD BE MEGALOMANIC. I HAVE ADOPTED THE TONE OF ARROGANT SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH CHARACTERIZES THEM
I HAVE LOST MY TEMPER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS...
I HAVE INSULTED AND DEPRECATED MOST OF YOUR MOST STRONGLY HELD BELIEFS
ALREADY
ALREADY I CAN FEEL MY SENSE OF 'CONNECTEDNESS' MY PEACE OF MIND'.
FALLING AWAY FROM ME
AND SO..
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE
I WILL SIMPLY SAY

GOODBYE


RIGHT
WHO WANTS TO DIE FIRST?

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave & Gerhard,

Just a short note to say how much I enjoyed meeting you at UKCAC.

"I very much enjoyed meeting you at UKCAC."

But seriously, it was good to talk to you. You seemed to be enjoying yourselves, but I wonder how you felt at the end of the trip; a little knackered, I presume.

Thanks very much for the sketch (it more than compensates for the stick-man you drew me last time you were here) and I really like the pages you sold me. On the Sunday, I had loads of friends asking me where I'd got them, which led to me wondering if you sell them by mail order? If you are amenable to the idea, could you let me have a list of the pages available and the prices, including any discount for bulk purchase?

After such a lengthy absence, your presence at UKCAC was much appreciated. Just don't leave it so long till the next time.

Yours sincerely,

Marlon A Seton
22A Woolwich Road
Greenwich
London S E.
10 0JU

P.S. You still have my metallic silver pen!

We are still trying to find a way to sell the artwork that is equitable for *Cerebus* art collectors and for us. The publishing side takes precedence (for obvious reasons) so it might be a while before Ger and I even START talking about it. Sorry.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Many thanks for the use of my photo on the back cover of #174. When I sent copies to the four of you, I did hope that it might appear in someone's letter column, but the cover made it much easier for me to shove it in everyone's face as they came into the store that weekend.

As one of the stores who paid in April for *Collegiate Hepcats*, let me make one small observation of why this is still not the perfect solution.

You said Martin sold out of the copies he brought to Chicago Con. I received my copies two days after the Con. If I'd received them two days before the con, Chris Budd would have bought a copy to take to Chicago to have Martin sign. Instead he bought a copy from Martin. If Chris got it from me, his regular *Hepcats* source, Martin would have had one more copy to sell to somebody else. Flawless logic, right?

I was happy to help out Martin to get the books printed, but as an aid to self-publishers, I preferred buying Jeff Smith's "The Spirit of Adventure" print. I hope to be able to pick up these sorts of items from time to time to support good comics.

John Judge, *Rivercity Comics*
507 S. 3rd St
Clinton, IA
USA 52732

P.S. Do you remember Chris, Dave? He's one who got started with *Free Cerebus* and got most of his stuff signed by you at Moondog's and at Chicon. He's in Denver at art school and will probably be embarrassed to see his name in print.

Mmm. Actually, Martin could have sold a bunch more copies if he had had them. I'm sure the copy of the *Collegiate Hepcats* in question will sell for you no problem once word gets out that Martin is down to his last handful of first printings, or when the second volume is released.

Hey! Hey, Chris! Are you embarrassed?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Well, I'm here.

Decidedly,
Derek McCulloch

Some Bar in New Orleans
New Orleans, LA

As David Lee Roth said, 'the bad news is, we've lost our way. The good news is, we're way ahead of schedule.' Take care, Derek.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave and Ger,

Re: the suggestion of Eolake Stobblehouse (great name, by the way — and I thought mine was unpronounceable) in 174. Is this person some sort of fool? Don't they understand anything about the comics industry? That plan won't work. You'll need to start the numbering all over again, because *Cerebus* 1 is infinitely more saleable than *Cerebus* 301. Then take six to eight months to put out number two. Then release *The Cerebus Files* 1. Don't bother with a number 2, just solicit orders for it for three years. Anyway, you'll be too busy with your fantastic new series *Dave Sim's Jaka* 1 (of a four-part limited series), although by "busy" I mean that you'll be supervising some desperate twenty-year-old who draws in your style. I've thought of some great copy for you: "She lost her Missy — Meet Missy II", and Missy II could be a huge gun, preferably featuring a razor-sharp bayonet. Good, huh? I've got a million of them. How about putting A-V in the top lefthand corner of the cover? Much more marketable. Heck, why not do a new *Cerebus* 1 now, and run the two series simultaneously, with crossover storylines in the summer? Just think of it — at the very least you'll really piss Gary Groth off.

See ya,

David Groenewegen
1/1 Wattletree Road
Armadale VIC 3143
Australia

P.S. Sorry about the crappy typing — it's been a while since I last used one of these things, but I don't have access to a computer in my new house.

Hell, we could just do a cover, a press release and a trading card and live like kings on the ol' convention circuit. Hmm.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Maybe it's because in turning thirty in ten days, or maybe it's just the obvious reason, but I've been thinking a lot about the Free Speech vs. Political Correctness issue lately.

In early August, Senator Carol Mosely-Braun called a press conference to charge Orrin Hatch and Jesse Helms with harassment. Now, let's leave the Senators' political leanings out of this, as I feel a bit queasy defending a couple of arch-conservatives. But the thing that bugs me about this in particular and the Free Speech vs. Political Correctness issue in general is Mosely-Braun's statement around August 6 that "A Fundamental Right is Freedom from Insult."

Let's think about this for a minute, shall we?

Now, I'm no lawyer, Dave, but I watched *L.A. Law* in college and I'm pretty sure that any such perceived "right" would be incompatible with our constitutionally-guaranteed right to free speech. That is, Hatch and Helms (or any other dick) can pretty much say whatever they want as long as it isn't libellous, slanderous, or dangerous. You know, like yelling "movie" in a crowded firehouse.

If freedom from insult *was* protected under law, could you litigate perceived insults or only actual insults? If brought to trial, could you enter one of four pleas: "guilty", "not guilty", "nolo contendere", and "I didn't mean it how they took it"?

I don't know about you, Dave, but I want the rest of you to wait right here while I go retain some counsel.

Later,

Larry Young
1578 Fell St., #4
San Francisco, CA
USA 94117

If 'Freedom from Insult' were a fundamental right, network television would be in for one mama of a class-action suit.

★★★★★★★★★★

They say that the wages of sin are death, but after they take out the taxes, all that is left is a tired feeling.

Dear Dave,

Enclosed is my first published story, "Uncertainty and the Dread Word Love," from the October issue of *Amazing Stories*. My second story, "Faith and Friendship in the Pre-Atomic Age," will be out in the December issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. "Uncertainty" is the third story I have sold, but it is the first to appear. "Marooned on the Railroad to Moscow," the first story I ever sold, is scheduled to appear sometime in 1994, over three years after it was purchased. Even though I write prose instead of comic books, a lot of what you have been saying about artists controlling the production of their own work has hit home for me.

I wonder if there is a difference in the ratio of comic book creators who make a living from their art compared to the number of prose writers who do. I know the percentage of science fiction writers who make a living writing science fiction is tiny. Of the 500+ members of the Science Fiction Writers of America, you can count on two hands the number who support themselves and their families with just their writing. The number perhaps triples if you include all those who write full time but are subsidized by spouses, independent incomes, or (very rarely) grants. The rest of us have a full-time job that puts food on the table and make time for the writing as we can.

The only good side to this is that it allows you complete creative freedom. Since you don't have to publish to eat, you can write about anything. When I was writing "Uncertainty," there was general agreement among my friends that it wasn't a science fiction story and so I should put a ghost or something into it so it would sell. The story I wanted to tell, however, didn't have any ghosts in it, so I sent it out as it was. I didn't need to sell the story to make my rent so I watched with disappointment, but no real concern, as a series of magazines rejected "Uncertainty," two of them explicitly because they didn't think it was a science fiction story. I cashed the check in a hurry when *Amazing* finally bought it, but I could have gone on sending the story around for years. I have with others.

Having a day job also allows you to have a life, because it lets you take time away from your writing. Since you don't depend on the writing income, it doesn't matter if you finish the story tomorrow or next week. Which is not to say that every writer doesn't dream of being able to write full time, because we do. It is only that a writer doesn't have to give up either the writing or what interferes with it. He can just hang on and do less of both than he would like.

Anyway, I hope you will enjoy "Uncertainty" even half as much as I enjoy *Cerebus* each month. Be cool,

Synaptically yours,

Eric T. Baker
2695 Glengyle Drive
Vienna, VA
USA 22181

P.S. Curious *Cerebus* fans who would like to read either of my stories and can't find a copy of *Amazing* or *F&SF* on their newsstands can write to me and I'll send them a free photocopy.

Thanks for the story. I like it. A lot.

★★★★★★★★★★

it's cookie time again . . .

A very strange thing happened to me today. It relates to the letter I sent you last July, which you will be printing in *Cerebus* 174. Which I have not yet seen, having just gotten *Cerebus* 173 last Friday. Strange? Not yet, there's more.

Today's mail contained a large white envelope from "C.J.", who is from New England. I do not know C.J., and he does not know me. Inside, there were two of the issues of *Cerebus* which I mentioned in my letter as having been unable to get.

I thought it was a joke, but not at six dollars postage. Inside was a short note to the effect of here they are so you don't have to drive around Florida trying to find these. Well, I can dial information as well as anyone, so I called, wondering if C.J., no first name on the envelope, was a man or woman . . .

He was a he, I told him who I was, and asked him how he knew I wanted these! He said, "In the letter column." Well, while even egotistical me might miss my own letter while reading the story, my wife really likes your letters column, and never misses one So I asked what issue it was in, figuring I had simply lost track of another issue, and he told me "*Cerebus* 174, I just got it last Wednesday."

Dave, you gotta do something about distribution down here. I

just got *Cerebus* 173 *last Friday*. I said as much to C.J., and I asked him why he sent me the books.

His response was pretty much as his note. He had a couple of extra copies lying around, and he thought it was silly having to drive all over Florida looking for back issues. He never once said, "give me money", though I said in my letter I was more than willing to pay a reasonable price. I'll think of something nice to do for him.

This is the kind of thing that makes a bad day beautiful. It doesn't end wars, or promote literacy, or feed children, but I feel a hell of a lot more comfortable in this world knowing that the C.J.'s of the world are nice enough to do something nice for a total stranger, just because of a letter column in an issue of a comic book that I haven't even read yet. Thank you, however you managed it, to get some real nice people reading *Cerebus*.

And thank you, C.J. If this sees print, I don't want you besieged by people looking for freebies, but write again, and we can shoot the breeze, maybe even in the hollow halls of Aardvark Comment. If this doesn't get printed, it's OK, I'll be sending something in the way of thanks when I can.

and to all, a Good Night

Michael Buckley
411 NE 40th Terrace
Ocala, FL
USA 34470

The hollow halls of Aardvark Comment. I know it's supposed to be 'hallowed', but I kind of like the sound of it. I mean there's nobody really *in* here . . . it's just a big pool of typesetting. The hollow halls.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Okay, here's the situation:

Her name is **Meg Chase.** She's intelligent. She's really nice. She's absolutely gorgeous. We have one class together — Introduction to Sociology. I haven't even talked to her yet, but I'm dying to ask her out. How the heck do I approach her? Here's what I came up with:

1. After class, ask her if she wants to study for the upcoming test with me.

   PROS: Innocent enough, a good way to break the ice.

   CONS: There has to be an upcoming test. Kinda boring.

2. Ask her if she would like to join me for a walk.

   PROS: More personal than just studying, indicates I'm interested in her. Good conversation will likely result.

   CONS: Not many warm days left. Also kind of awkward to ask, considering we've never spoken to each other.

3. Cut through the crap and ask her out to dinner and/or a movie.

   PROS: Direct, to the point. Also makes for a nice, long evening — creates plenty of opportunities to be charming.

   CONS: Too direct — might scare her.

4. Give her a comic book. During one class, our teacher asked us what we were doing over vacation, and I let everyone know I was going to Comicfest '93. I could give her a comic and tell her it made me think about her or something.

   PROS: Offbeat, different. A good love story might do the trick. *Cerebus* #0 is another good choice.

   CONS: Girls just don't care about comics. She might think I was a freak.

5. Show her an issue of *Cerebus* with her name printed in it.

   PROS: It's really cool to see your name in print, especially in something as amazing as *Cerebus*. I might also win points if she knew her name was in there because of my actions. (Aww . . . that's so sweet of you!)

   CONS: There isn't an issue of *Cerebus* with **Meg Chase's** name in it yet. I probably won't wait for one to come out before choosing another course of action.

Well, there you go. There isn't much in Castleton, but I do have a car, so I could drive to nearby Rutland or less-nearby Glens Falls. If anyone else out there has any suggestions, especially girls, I'd love to hear them. Don't tell me to go to parties; I don't drink, and I don't go to parties. I'm open to anything else.

I'll let you know what happens . . .

Dan Parker
Castleton State College
Box B12
Castleton, VT
USA 05735

I have my name in *Cerebus* all the time and it never works for me. Mm. No. That isn't true. Well, I hope it works. I'll even ask Linda to put Meg Chase's name in bold type, okay, Linda?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

This is one of those old "love letter" type things that I have been trying to write for I don't know how long now, but reading Mr. Flanders' letter in #174 tweaked something in me that made me sit down and write it.

This is a long story and I'm not exactly sure where to start, so please excuse me if I make no sense.

The girl, let's say her name is Cindy, I first met years ago, in 6th grade. I had a crush on her real bad, and she held me in horror. I gave her a flower for flower day, and she ran away, an event I believe scarred me for life. Heh heh.

Well, we had classes together in 6th grade, and through the year, she got over her "fear" of me and began talking to me.

In seventh and eighth grade, we had some classes, and kind of kept "in touch".

Then in ninth grade, we had almost all of our classes together, and we started really talking. We started becoming fairly good friends, and then, to accelerate things further, I moved into my grandparents' house, which happened to be a couple houses down the street from her house. We got to be good friends in the course of that year, and over the summer, I visited her house many times and got to know her little brother and the rest of her family fairly well. But unfortunately, that little feeling began to build up in me.

In tenth grade, we really began to become really good friends. But at the same time, I began to fall in "love" with her.

So, I eventually became obsessed with her. And I can honestly say now that I love her, and she is the only person I have ever loved.

It is almost impossible to describe the feelings she evokes in me. Many guys say they want to be friends with a girl, but their intentions are to get them in bed that night. It is not that way with me. I truly love this girl, but I also cherish my close friendship with

her very much. I value her and her friendship so much.

I firmly believe she saved my life. When we started to become really good friends, I was on the way downhill, big time. I was drinking, smoking, and had begun getting into drugs. But then as I started to like her, I realized that in order for her to respect me, I had to respect myself first. So. I quit. Drinking, smoking, everything. I did my darnedest to change my attitudes and to try and make myself a better person.

Amazing what love can do, ain't it?

The changes never did make my goals a reality, which was to go out with her, but now when I look back, I am very glad I made them.

Through time, I have become completely obsessed with her. I can't stop thinking about her, and all that stuff, plus other things. I can never enjoy myself on a date with another girl, because I always get the feeling that I am somehow betraying her. I can break down in tears in a moment if the right thing triggers a memory.

I have told her how I feel about her, or at least tried, many times. And just as many times she has told me that she does care about me as a friend, but no more.

We are still very good friends and we keep in touch since she has left for college. She's at a college that is only an hour or so away, so it's not too bad. I write her at least once a week to make sure I don't forget her and she doesn't forget me.

Shit. I sit here and write all this, and didn't get anything accomplished, as far as trying to explain how I feel goes. But to do that, I'd probably have to write a book.

But I love her more than life itself, and I simply cannot get her out of my head. I have tried so many times, but just cannot get myself over her.

So there ya go. My little story. Trust me, there's a lot more to it, but I just can't figure out how to sensibly put it all on paper. Help me out, Dave. Let me see one of your wonderfully insightful remarks that will make me see the folly of my ways.

Or just throw this letter in the trash.

A Retailer

As long as you're a member of someone's fan club (i.e. not the one they're sleeping with) your personal life will be a complete misery. You made the attempt and it's 'no go'. Stop torturing yourself. Even if she was a girl in a million, that means there are between four and five thousand of her on the planet at this very moment. (Sorry to go on like that, folks, but I know the guy who wrote it and he could pull a lot of chicks if he just made up his mind to).

★★★★★★★★★★

Hey, Dave,

I am angry and bitter. I've been driving in rush-hour traffic for nearly an hour after a job interview that was probably a huge waste of time, and I'd like to kick about half the world right in the eye. I feel this great need to rant and spew venomous hatred, so bear with me, OK?

Hey, Defiant! Mr. Shooter! Yer new milieu looked interesting at first, the whole organipunk kinda thing, and I was ready to give it a chance, but if you don't publish the first issue (excuse me, zero-th, prelude, whatever) in a form that I want to purchase, if you want to make people buy — what the fuck is the deal? — TRADING CARD SETS to get the whole story, then go right ahead but don't look for any cash from me. Is #0 an integral part of the story? Hey, I've got a great idea — you could wrap up your first big story arc with a special double-sized issue, and publish each page *as a separate prize in a box of cereal!!!* Think about it! You could even market your own cereal — "Plasm Particles — special inside: Plasm #10! 48 pages, collect 'em all!" Offer a special set — all 48 pages, guaranteed, plus a cabinet to hold all the boxes! But don't open them or eat the cereal, you know, or it won't be mint . . . At 48 boxes of cereal per fanboy, you'd make more money than Dave Sim!

Hey, Innovation! Yer novel adaptations are pretty cool! So why don't you fucking FINISH THEM? I'm still waiting for "The Light Fantastic" and "The Shadow of the Torturer" to wrap up. Sorry, but I'm not about to risk more of my money on that sort of thing, so good luck with Lucifer's Hammer and whatever else you have on the way — maybe I'll pick 'em up when all the issues are out. Maybe not.

Hey, all you cool bands making CDs with *snicker* Hey, let's put ninety 1-second blank tracks in the middle of the album* or *ha ha ha* How about adding twenty minutes of silence to the last track so that the CD looks like it's an hour long!* You know who you are. Enjoy a great big "Thanks a lot, shithead!" from everyone who owns a CD player with shuffle play! Yes, shuffle play! It DOES exist, you know. (Tip o'the hat to They Might Be Giants, who took shuffle play into account when designing their last album.)

Whew. I feel better now.

Karl Hiller
1264 W. Galbraith Rd.
Cinti, OH
USA 45231

Whoa. Good thing these really are hollow halls or we might have had a few serious injuries there.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave —

I hate you. For two reasons: a. "It really is best not to get too attached to anyone in your life. They're there for a reason, I think, but the reason is seldom permanent." And b. you're right.

I love *Cerebus*, I would give my left arm for the furry gray bastard, but I hate you.

Here's to beers, tears, and 126 more issues —

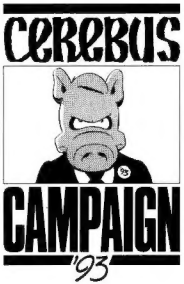
Cindy Rosenthal
Eigenmann 934
Bloomington, IN
USA 47406

As Bob Burden once said, 'I've been around the block so many times I feel like my turn-blinker got stuck.'

1994
DAVE SIM PERSONAL APPEARANCES

OZCON III
FEBRUARY 4–6
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
Park Lane Hotel
161 Elizabeth Street

CRISIS CON
MARCH 6
BURLINGTON, VT
Radisson Hotel



'It's not over, 'til we SAY it's over!'

Dear Dave,

Eternal optimist that I am, I suspect that Campaign '93 may not be quite the lame duck that you think.

I'm sure there are numerous retailers out there working hard to promote *Cerebus*, who simply don't take the time to tell you about it. Take me for example. I've been an avid supporter for years, but never felt the need to make you aware of that fact prior to the tour last year, and this is the first time I have ever written to you.

Campaign '93 has been helpful to me, as I have benefitted from some of the ideas shared in the letters column. Preston Sweet's *Sandman/Cerebus* cross-promotion idea, for example was a really good idea which I immediately put to use in my stores. (Thanks to Preston, for providing me with a copy to work from.)

I would now like to return the favor by sharing what has been our most successful means of introducing people to *Cerebus*. As a retailer, I have found that there are two primary obstacles to selling *Cerebus* to a new reader.

1. The current issue is absolutely not the place to get started, and
2. The best place to start is with the phone books, but when you are dealing with someone who is not familiar with the book, and who had no interest in it before you started talking to them, the price can be a difficult leap of faith.

What we have done to solve these problems is create a *Cerebus* "starter set". Out sets consist of *Cerebus* #0, five consecutive issues of the *Bi-Weeklies*, and *Spawn* #10 (to entice those who are reluctant to try anything outside of the mainstream). These sets are priced at $3.95, and have effectively helped us overcome both of the largest obstacles to selling *Cerebus* to new readers. In today's market, it is not uncommon to spend $3.95 for a single comic, and this package gives them a taste of what *Cerebus* is all about. Many of the people who we have sold starter sets to have come back for the phone books. (There is no more gratifying sale than a new reader's first phone book.)

We planned ahead for these sets, and stocked heavily on all of the components, but something similar should be possible in any store with back issue inventory (particularly the *Bi-Weeklies*).

I realize that by the time this letter sees print (assuming it does) 1993 will be a memory, but hey, it's not over until we say it's over, right Dave?

John Christian
Paper Heroes
204 D. Ft. Hood Road
Killeen, TX
USA 76541

★★★★★★★★★★

Well, it's the January 1994 issue, but I thought that John's letter was the best possible afterward for Campaign '93.

My intention in 1994 is to produce and circulate an advertising clip-art booklet for use by the stores. I've just been getting a few preliminary ideas together, so I don't expect that the booklet itself will be ready to ship to the stores on the Campaign '93 list until March (or possibly as late as April). The decision to do a clip-art book as opposed to the pre-packaged booklets that we had in the '93 package stemmed from discussion with retailers. Most stores have someone on staff or freelancing who designs advertisements, store displays, etc. By having a general assortment of *Cerebus* advertisements available, it makes the job of designing ads that are suitable to individual store's needs that much easier. Differences in geography and community can be accommodated more easily. I'll be trying to include a mixture of approaches intended for alternative and student newspapers (the most widely used print forums for comic book stores), as well as suggested copy for radio advertisements, t-shirt designs, button designs, etc. I feel that the experiment of permitting stores to generate and sell, in-house, their own *Cerebus* merchandise has been very successful. It took a great deal for me to overcome the 'trademark paranoia' that is so firmly engrained in every creative individual: and while I haven't been completely satisfied with every statue or t-shirt I've seen, the enthusiasm on the part of the stores in being able to genuinely participate in low-cost, exclusive promotion of *Cerebus* has more than compensated for any doubts I had. I strongly urge other self-publishers to experiment with this. It really works.

Thanks for reminding me, John. It *isn't* over, 'til we *say* it's over.

DAVE 'N' GER, *FANTASTIC STORE*, LONDON

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